

Two Nationalisms

A white-nationalist plutocracy in America; a Hindutvavadi nationalist in India.

The Hindutvavadi nationalist elite are exhilarated. They are filled with pride that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the fifth “world leader” that Donald Trump has called, ahead of even those from Japan or Russia, or even Germany and

France. Trump’s presidential inauguration speech was, as expected, a nationalistic tirade proclaiming “America First.” A megalomaniac is given to yelling and ranting; one has come to expect this from Trump. His speech was all about protecting

“our borders,” not allowing others to make “our products,” steal “our companies,” destroy “our jobs.”

Trump declared that a “small group in our nation’s capital”—“politicians,” “the establishment”—has allowed “foreign industry” to be “enriched” at the “expense of American industry,” permitted the spending of “trillions and trillions of dollars” of American money “overseas,” even as “America’s infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay.” He outdid his own overblown rhetoric when he claimed that “the wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world.” To hell with “the establishment,” he thundered, “we are transferring power from Washington DC and giving it back to you, the people.” But who is “the people” if not the Trump standing in for them?

And, who are the “we”? Surely by the “we” Trump meant “white nationalists” when he said: “We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny,” and called on them to swear “total allegiance to the United States of America,” acquire “a new national pride.” Trump even undertook to eradicate “radical Islamic terrorism ... from the face of the earth.” Indeed, even Beijing, Moscow, Berlin, London, Paris and Tokyo must have been alarmed by what Trump said at his inauguration as the 45th President of the United States (us). Is the world entering another phase of intense inter-imperialist rivalry? Already Trump’s nominee for Secretary of State, the former ExxonMobil chief executive officer Rex Tillerson has promised that Washington would bar the Chinese from accessing the islands they control in the South China Sea.

Modi must surely be gratified by the militaristic diatribe, as well as Trump’s pledge to obliterate “radical Islamic terrorism ... from the face of the earth.” Indeed, in his first speech in the Lok Sabha after being sworn into office as Prime Minister, on 11 June 2014 Modi had claimed: “1,200 saalo ki ghulaami ki maansikta Hindustaniyon ko pareshaan karti rahi hai” (colonial subjugation over 1,200 years has plagued Indians). Clearly, he expressed the Hindutvavadi perspective of Indian history, wherein the “Muslim civilisation” period is depicted in terms of “despotic tyranny,” in sharp contrast to the earlier “Hindu civilisation,” portrayed as 2,000 years of a “golden age.” But, as far as we know, there was not even a murmur of protest or argument in Parliament. Since

then, in the two-and-a-half years, what has come into place is an “authoritarian–democratic” regime that maintains a close nexus with big business. This regime nurtures and supports the Hindutvavadi nationalist movement that brought it to power, even to the extent of being complicit in that movement’s “patriotic” acts, such as attacking or even lynching alleged cow-killers or beef-eaters in the name of *gau mata ki raksha* (protection of the sacred cow). And the regime insists on controlling its “necessary” enemies through the use of terror. Mass opposition to this semi-fascistic regime is, however, yet to come.

So it was heartening to find that the very next day—following Trump’s presidential inauguration—there were mass demonstrations in a number of cities across the us, and even in other parts of the world. The really huge ones in the us were in Washington DC, New York City, Chicago and Boston, and significant international ones in Mexico City, London, Paris, Berlin and Sydney. These mass demonstrations are indeed a powerful reminder to the incoming Trump administration that a whole lot of people stand united against chauvinistic nationalism, racism and misogyny.

The American public is concerned about what might happen to immigrants, African-Americans, Muslims, and sexual minorities. The demonstrators were protesting against pro-business policies, militarism, police brutality, and stood in defence of human rights. They are worried about what would happen to the public education system with the impending appointment of billionaire Betsy DeVos, a proponent of privatisation of schools, as Education Secretary. They are equally concerned that a Tea Party Republican, Tom Price, Trump’s nominee for the post of Health Secretary, might further damage Medicare, Medicaid, and, indeed, healthcare in general.

These are all legitimate fears with a real-estate billionaire as president who has a cabinet composed of ex-generals, right-wing ideologues, billionaires and multimillionaires. Truly, America is no longer a functioning liberal–political democracy; it is a plutocracy. And that plutocracy is trying to legitimise its rule with an appeal to white nationalism. America’s “Major Defence Partner,” the regime in India, seemingly riding high following the triumph of Hindutvavadi nationalism over “secular” nationalism, and secure as a result of its established close nexus with big business, would surely be emboldened with Trump in the White House.